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RESEARCH PAPER

Cryptozoology in the Medieval and Modern Worlds

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Abstract

Popular interest in cryptozoology (the study of unconfirmed species, such as bigfoot and chupacabra*) has been fuelled by a recent publishing frenzy of encyclopaedias, dictionaries, and guides devoted to the subject, as well as by unprecedented opportunities for enthusiasts to collect data and exchange stories via the Internet. The author situates the emotional commitment many exhibit toward cryptids (the creatures themselves) in a broad historical context. Unconfirmed species served as an implicit ground of conflict and dialogue between untutored masses and educated elite, even prior to the rise of academic science as a unified body of expert consensus. The psychological significance of cryptozoology in the modern world has new facets, however: it now serves to channel guilt over the decimation of species and destruction of the natural habitat; to recapture a sense of mysticism and danger in a world now perceived as fully charted and over-explored; and to articulate resentment of and defiance against a scientific community perceived as monopolising the pool of culturally acceptable beliefs.*

"Man, it is true, can, by combination, surmount all his *real* enemies, and become master of the whole of animal creation: But does he not immediately raise up to himself *imaginary* enemies, the dæmons of his fancy . . .?"—David Hume (Smith 1947, 195).

Introduction

When South African villagers in 1997 attributed nine deaths to Mamlambo, the brain-sucking river monster of Mzintlava River, and called for local officials to take action, when Nessie Hunters scour the depths of Loch Ness with sonar and provide twenty-four-hour streaming coverage of the lake surface via Internet webcams, and when "Devil Hunters" organise off-hour expeditions into the Pine Barrens looking for New Jersey's most famous monster, they may not realise they are participating in a very ancient and socially important ritual in which communal space is defined and in which the boundaries of civilisation are constructed. North America has bigfoot, Puerto Rico has the "goat-sucking" gremlin *chupacabra*, and Sweden has a monster serpent in Lake Storsjon. Babylonian cuneiform tablets record incantations against the "evil spirit" and "evil demon . . . that have power by night over the street"; medieval manuscripts include amulet prescriptions against "the elfin race and night-goers"; and the seventh-century *Life of Saint Columba* describes an encounter between the saint and a savage water monster living in the depths of the River Ness in Scotland. [1] In Ireland, St Senan of Inis Cathaigh (Scattery Island) on the river Shannon, who died *c.* 544, is said to have banished a gruesome sea and land monster called *Cathach*, northwards through Co. Clare to Doolough Lake (*Dubh Loch*: "Black/Dark Lake"

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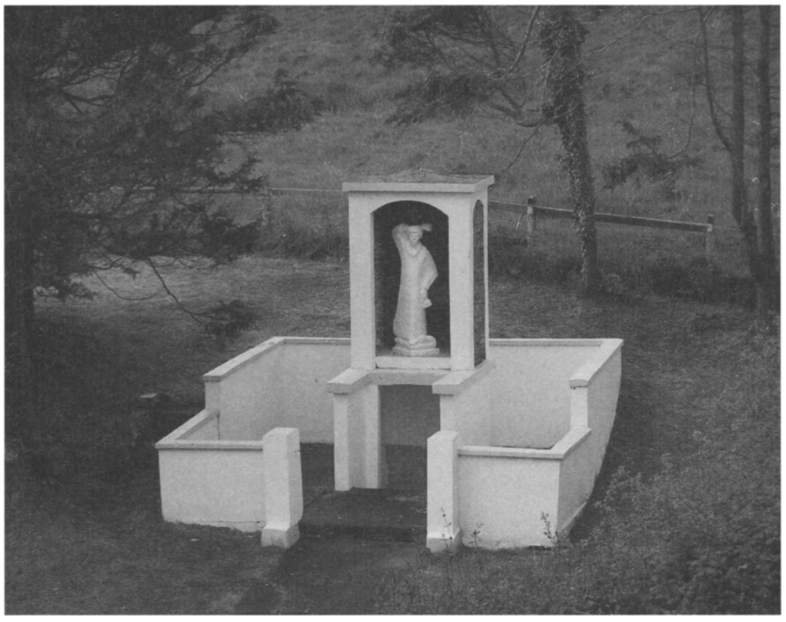

Figure 1. St Senan in Monster-Banishing Mode. The figure of St Senan at the holy well dedicated to him, near Kilrush, Co. Clare, Ireland, shows the saint with his left foot on the monster while brandishing a cudgel in his right hand, and holding his bell in his left. The monster, as he was being banished to Doolough Lake is said, in the oral tradition of the area, to have rested in this place. Photograph: Anne Rowbottom 2005; Sculpture by James O'Halloran, 1983.

at Mount Callan, the largest lake in the county (Kenney 1929, 364–6; Stokes 1890, 66–7 [Irish text], 213–4 [translation]) (see Figure 1) and St Patrick is said to have overcome a reptilic monster in Loch Derg (Loch Dearg: 'Red lake,' coloured by the monster's blood), Co. Donegal (Ó hÓgáin 1983, 99–9 and 121–2; de Pontfarcy 1988, 35–8). The beliefs are sufficiently consistent across time and place that the question becomes inevitable: what do they mean? Why does humanity, as a whole, so consistently and ubiquitously populate its border spaces with fascinating and sometimes threatening creatures? This essay serves as a brief meditation on the current significance of cryptids (as the creatures are currently known) in the context of their historical analogues.

A spate of popular monographs on cryptozoology has appeared recently. Much of this literature seems directly or indirectly apologetic, as though the authors are secretly hoping—even as they critically review the evidence—that the creatures in question truly exist and that they are the brave, early recorders of what science and society will someday acknowledge to be real. These works generally do not engage the very questions they raise, however, regarding the patent psychological and social needs fuelling such stories. Even the introductory sections to guides and encyclopaedias of worldwide cryptozoology do not seem very reflective about the patterns of belief they document so thoroughly. [2]

The point of this paper is not to disparage the important work of responsible cryptozoologists nor to imply that there is no legitimate place for cryptozoology within contemporary zoology. The International Society of Cryptozoology (active from 1982 to 1998), for instance, published sound research and reflection in its

newsletter and in a refereed journal (*Cryptozoology*). There are, of course, new species that remain to be discovered, and early reports of them will naturally appear folkloric before a specimen is secured and the scientific community can verify it. My intention is rather to unpack certain facets of the social significance of the widespread interest and even belief in such creatures *before* they are confirmed by science. George Eberhart catalogues some 1085 unconfirmed animals in his recent encyclopaedic *Guide to Cryptozoology*; Michael Newton catalogues 1583 in his *Encyclopedia of Cryptozoology*. Cryptozoologists themselves acknowledge that only a small percentage of putative species are likely to turn out real—thus conveying the vast majority of such sightings and local beliefs to the province of folklore. The bulk of the work in explaining these beliefs is thus left to folklorists rather than to naturalists.

The cultural significance of contemporary cryptozoology bears many similarities to, as well as some important differences from, the cryptozoology of the pre-modern world. In a sense, it can be argued that the term "cryptozoology" is itself an anachronism when applied to pre-modern cultures. By the study of "hidden animals," cryptozoologists expressly mean animals unconfirmed by contemporary science (that is, not appearing in standard textbooks), and such a distinction might seem to make less sense in the periods before the central organisation of scientific knowledge. Yet, no age has been without its share of hidden creatures, and confirmation of purported species has been a vital and consciously debated issue among the collectors of human knowledge for thousands of years. Furthermore, it is not the vast myriad of undiscovered mites or new varieties of zooplankton that cryptozoologists are really interested in; it is the large, sensational creatures that fill us with a fresh sense of wonder and surprise that dominate the discussions. In fact, Bernard Heuvelmans, the "Father of Cryptozoology," has proposed our emotional response as a core feature of a cryptid: to count as a cryptid, an animal must have at least one trait "truly singular, unexpected, paradoxical, striking, emotionally upsetting, and thus capable of mythification" (Heuvelmans 1983, 5). [3] At the very least, cryptozoologists usually maintain that there must be a "minimum size" for a creature to count as having cryptozoological interest. Even a cursory scan through works of cryptozoology or through cryptozoological online message boards makes it clear that what is being sought is not simply the unknown—it is the formidable, the frightening, the monstrous. In this sense, cryptozoology is nothing new.

Sensationalism and scepticism were in tension with one another even in antiquity. In the first century AD, Pliny marvelled at the wondrous diversity of the world, and filled the pages of his *Natural History* with whatever curious morsels he could glean from travel writing, scientific tracts, or myth. Despite his own wide travels and the unparalleled availability of many exotic species in first-century Rome, Pliny deferentially repeats a large amount of material from Greek authorities such as Aristotle and Ctesias. He shows little critical distance from his sources, despite the occasional tirade against, for instance, belief in werewolves among Greek writers (*Naturalis Historia* 8.34; Rackham 1940, 58–60). Pliny, along with other recorders of novel beasts and traits, such as Pomponius Mela, Aelian, and Solinus, provided the tradition of classical natural history that went on to provide many of the spectacular creatures in medieval bestiaries. On the other hand, many other commentators of the classical world were highly sceptical of the monsters popularised in travel literature and other works. In the first century BC, Lucretius

explained centaurs and other hybrid creatures as optical illusions and tricks of the mind (*De rerum natura* 4.722–6; Bailey 1947, 400–2). The second-century travel writer Pausanias often assumes that many myths, legends, and sensational stories he hears are exaggerated distortions of kernel truths (*Description of Greece* 9.21; Jones 1965, 261–3), while Strabo dismisses a host of travel writers who report the bizarre fauna of India as outright liars (*Geographicon* 2.1.9; Jones 1969, 263). [4] Lucian of Samosata flatly rejects the exotic tales of earlier travel writers such as Ctesias and Iambulus (Harmon 1961, 251). In short, throughout antiquity a meaningful dialogue concerning "confirmed" and "unconfirmed" species was sustained among writers, even if there was no centralised scientific academy with a unified taxonomical method. The belief structures of the ancient world were not different in kind from our own, such that the study of ancient monsters is folklore/mythology while that of contemporary cryptids is methodical science, mainstream or otherwise. [5] Both periods felt the need to populate their worlds with exotic animals—even while many know better—and both have done so. There are a variety of explanations for this need, but it is at least clear that in the classical period the zoology of the hidden and unconfirmed reflected anxiety about how vast and frightening the world was. [6] This stands in sharp contrast to contemporary cryptozoology, which serves rather as a marker of how weary many people are with a world over-explored, over-tamed, and over-understood.

The Medieval World

Albertus Magnus's thirteenth-century work, *De animalibus*, a lengthy compilation based on Aristotle and on a handful of commentators, is as close as the Middle Ages comes to a systematic natural history in our understanding of the term. Albertus supplements his source materials—and the Bible is notably lacking among them—with critical distance, independent analysis, and personal observation. Thus he employs distancing qualifiers such as "according to folk tales" and "the story goes," while de-mystifying extraordinary animal qualities by explaining them in rational terms (optical sciences, for instance, are deployed to explain the basilisk's deadly gaze). [7] Albertus examines the physiology, habitat, and behaviours of over five hundred animals while showing little interest in populating the borders of the charted world with sensational species. He also eschews to draw allegorical lessons from the animals he discusses, and in this respect stands well outside the mainstream approach to the natural world in medieval thought.

Allegory was among the predominant interpretive modes of the Middle Ages, and medieval bestiaries exemplify this tradition admirably. Beginning to flourish in the twelfth century, illustrated bestiaries served as repositories for knowledge about (mostly exotic) animals while simultaneously drawing breezy moral lessons from the natures and propensities of the various creatures. For some creatures, the moral is drawn by loose analogy and homiletic exhortation: just as sirens draw sailors by their hypnotic song, so should people not be charmed by flattery or ostentation in general (White 1984, 134; see also Hassig 1995, 104–15). Other animals serve as role models through their natural behaviour: as the ant fetches grains back to the nest over a distance, so should people be industrious in seeking the rewards of salvation (the morals often sound forced to modern ears,

admittedly). Finally, other animals serve as subjects of meditation and instruction not because of what they do, but simply because of what they are. The Phoenix, for instance, teaches us to believe in the Resurrection because it rises from its own immolation (White 1984, 127; see also Hassig 1995, 72–83). Likewise, since God provides even for the blind, simple sea-urchin (He is said to give the urchin foreknowledge of storms, such that the creature can anchor itself down accordingly), He will surely provide for even the humblest humans, in the most vulnerable of circumstances (White 1984, 213). The very existence of the animal is a message. The symbolism intended for human spiritual guidance is written into the very fabric of the landscape and the biosphere.

Behind their veneer of moral platitudes, bestiaries served a number of other important cultural functions. By hybridising the monstrous and the human, they continually raised questions about the essence of "humanity" by contrasting it with "animality" or "deformity." Bestiary descriptions highlight physiological processes that help define social taboos surrounding breathing, eating, drinking, defecating, and reproducing. The onager who jealously bites off the testicles of its own male offspring, the owl who lives in the nest filled with its own excrement, the half-human manticore who feeds on human flesh, the viper who bites off her mate's head during sexual ecstasy—all provided occasions for oblique meditation on the human body and social mores under the safe cloak of zoological natural history (Syme 1999; Hassig 1999 "Sex"). Bestiaries articulated tensions among social groups, such as the owl that represents Jews because it values darkness over light. The crane, on the other hand, represents social collectivism: when cranes become wearied by flying, they are reportedly crowded by the rest of the flock and supported in flight until sufficiently rested to go on alone (White 1984, 111; see also Yamamoto 2000, 12–33). The nature of romantic relationships is explored, as the viper is viewed as a role model in putting up with the foibles and annoying habits of one's spouse (Verner 2005, 111). Finally, bestiaries expressed theological and ideological concerns: the fox, for instance, is cast sometimes as the devil, sometimes as a corrupt cleric (Hassig 1995, 66–7). Thus it is important to recognise that these were not purely catalogues of knowledge for its own sake, but that the genre served a notable role in the projection of sublimated anxieties. They are, in this respect, precursors to modern illustrated guides and encyclopaedias of cryptozoology, whose pages are also filled with numerous illustrations and artistic renditions of fantastic creatures, usually contextualised in a natural landscape. [8]

It is unclear to what extent the compilers and readers of medieval bestiaries believed in the literal existence of their fantastic and exotic animals. [9] Probably, many readers believed many of the reports; probably few would have believed all of them. After all, classical and medieval thinkers can be excused for not being able to verify the tales brought back by travellers or recorded in texts from foreign lands. It was not "superstitious" of the Greek authors to regard ancient Atlantis with awe or of medieval ones to perpetuate stories of dragons or cannibal races; they simply had no way to confirm or deny most reports. [10] Literary communities in the pre-printing era certainly appreciated—probably better than we do—the potential hazards of scribal transmission, and predominantly oral communities know well the potential for corruption in oral accounts several generations removed from the source. As the preface to the early medieval *Liber monstrorum* (a text to be discussed shortly) cautions, "It is not open to anyone to

test whether the hearsay—in the glittery language of wondrous rumour—scattered throughout the entirety of the world is true or made up of lies." [11] Although medieval readers certainly respected venerable authorities such as Augustine and Isidore of Seville, this was not, as is sometimes implied in popular accounts, simply an age of unreflective credulity.

This is made clear in accounts of fabled creatures promulgated in other textual traditions aside from bestiaries, such as the cycle of short prose treatises associated with Alexander the Great. These highly exaggerated mosaics of tales about scattered lands, beasts, and human races, purportedly stemming from Alexander's conquests and strange encounters in Asia, blur the distinction between allegorical fantasy and travel literature. The *Wonders of the East* is a well-known compilation within this tradition, appearing in a sumptuously illustrated manuscript of the mid-eleventh century and also appearing (in Old English translation) in the same manuscript as *Beowulf*. [12] The *Wonders of the East* includes, side by side, accounts that we now consider partially true and partially false—for instance, we find "a race of very black people who are called Ethiopians" alongside eight-foot, gorgon-eyed, two-headed beasts that burst into flames when touched. [13] The Old English translator of the texts adds to his rendition of the gorgon-eyed beasts: "They are very unusual animals." [14] Another text in this tradition is the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*, written as a first-person account by Alexander himself and preserved in a late-eleventh-century manuscript. [15] Among the natural obstacles and barbarians encountered is a medley of wondrous creatures: in a dry, reed-laden swamp, for instance, the narrator claims that his army was assaulted by a "new kind of beast" ("*belua novi generis*"; Boer 1973, 29). The creature has the torso of a hippopotamus, with a serrated back, and it has one head like a lioness and another like a crocodile. The hide is too thick for puncturing weapons, so the troop must bludgeon the monster to death. Then, the text notes, "we marvelled for a long time at its novelty" ("*admirati autem sumus diu novitatem eius*"; text in Boer 1973, 29). The manuscript from Anglo-Saxon England mentioned earlier (British Library Cotton Vitellius A.xv, containing the *Wonders of the East* and *Beowulf*) also contains an Old English translation of the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle* and another work containing strange wonders, the *Passion of St. Christopher*. [16] In short, it seems to represent a collection of narratives containing fantastic creatures. There is an obvious sense, then, that distinct genres existed—even in the Middle Ages—dependent upon the exotic creatures.

A remarkable collection in a similar vein is the seventh-century or eighth-century *Liber monstrorum*, a compilation of accounts stitched together from such sources as Pliny, the *Letter of Alexander*, and Virgil. [17] Here we meet again the familiar sciopods and pygmies of Pliny in one section, along with a second section devoted to a menagerie of beasts both exotic (leopards, hippopotamuses) and fabled (Cerberus, minotaur). The third section is a brief, independent catalogue of serpents and dragons. Two things are notable about the *Liber monstrorum*. First is its scepticism about its own subject matter and its manifest contempt for the tall tales it records. The work opens with a statement that probably most of the stories are lies, and comments off-hand that where reports indicate a city of gold and shores strewn with gems ("*urbs aurea et gemmis aspersa litora*") there is probably only "a rocky or stony city or none at all" ("*lapideam aut nullam urbem et scopulosa*";

Orchard 1995, 256). The prologue cautions that readers must judge for themselves the merits of each story: "may each person sift for himself from among the narrative that follows" (*"sequentem historiam sibi quisque discernat"*; Orchard 1995, 256). As Andy Orchard documents, distancing tropes such as "they say," "we read," and "it is said"—old tropes, to be sure, familiar from the classical era—are pervasive throughout the work (Orchard 1995, 90). [18]

Secondly, unlike most classical sources—for whom these fabled races and beasts were simply curious inhabitants of distant places—the *Liber monstrorum* regards its subjects as suspicious and even malicious. John Friedman notes that it is "perhaps the earliest work to give us a markedly and consistently hostile treatment of the monstrous races" (Friedman 1981, 149). [19] The species are the degenerate remnants of earlier races, miscreants who do not properly fit within the boundaries of the civilised world nor into the proper cycles of the natural world. They bear in their very deformities—and in their isolation—the displeasure of God. It is characteristic of the creatures of this tradition to inhabit isolated regions: remote islands or mountain ranges, deep ponds and lakes, swamps (Friedman 1981, 152; Orchard 1995, 89 and 92). In fact, the very question that the work proposes to answer in the prologue is whether there are indeed, as rumoured, fantastic things living in the hidden corners of the earth: "whether so many kinds of monsters in hidden parts of the world can be believed." [20] Thus, the spatial isolation of these creatures is a sign of moral decay, a stain of pollution, no less than their physical abnormalities. In the twelfth century, Gerald of Wales consciously redirects the marvels of the "East" trope to apply to the West instead, documenting the strange creatures and peoples of Ireland using a similar rhetoric of isolation:

> Just as the regions of the East are distinguished by sights particular and unique to themselves, so also the expanses of the West are renowned for their own natural wonders. For sometimes nature—as though exhausted by grave and genuine matters—withdraws and oversteps a little in remote places, as if it is amusing itself through such shy and secret deviations. [21]

Gerald situates the site of monstrosity not in India or faraway mythical islands, but at home. In this respect, this cycle of texts is an important series of antecedents for modern cryptozoological accounts.

The Contemporary World

There is undoubtedly a continuum behind the psychological need for folkloric monsters running from the ancient to the modern world. [22] Probably, we will always project primordial fears onto creatures lurking just beyond reach and just out of sight—ill-defined fear of the dark, the unknown, the reptilian. It is not known to what extent the dangers of the Paleolithic landscape are etched into biological instinct, such that low growls, large teeth, the slithering of vermin, and the dark are still the stuff of nightmares (rather than more likely contemporary dangers such as heart disease or car accidents). The construction of "monsters" in art, literature, and mythology seems to provide a mechanism for articulating human qualities (especially libidinal ones) that must be publicly repudiated, perhaps even exorcised, through the very act of externalising and naming them (Gilmore 2003, 4–5). The "hairy man" or giant probably meant different things to

different pre-modern societies. In the contemporary world, however, bigfoot has been read as a reflection of ourselves: we perpetuate bigfoot beliefs from an apparent psychological need to crystallise fascination with primitivism and animalism into a concrete symbol (Gilmore 2003, 73–4; Daegling 2004, 259). Given the different role of the scientific community in contemporary culture, the social significance of borderland monsters is also different in the modern world.

From the fifteenth century through the nineteenth century, discoveries of new lands and large new species continued to animate the natural sciences and inspire scientists with a sense of awe (see Figures 2 and 3). The human relationship with physical, geographic space—and indeed, with the natural world—began to shift radically following the mid-nineteenth century, when the last pockets of substantially unexplored space were mapped and catalogued. By the start of the twentieth century, there were few large land-species left to be discovered. As a result, we were forced to confront the fact that we now knew, for the most part, what kinds of animals did and did not exist, and roughly what their populations and habitats were. This was a requisite pre-condition for the environmental-awareness movements that began to flourish in the 1960s and 1970s, because it created a popular sense of familiarity and proprietorship, real or imagined, for the animals we like to consider under our stewardship. Thus, as Noel Boaz observes, "baby seal plush toys are sent to contributors who want to stop the killing of fur seals, save-the-whale educators drive to schools in an old Volkswagen van painted like a whale, and virtually every group produces that ubiquitous identifying badge of cultural identity, a T-shirt, with a brightly screen-printed image of 'their' endangered species on it. These are their totems, identifying them with a common cultural cause, conferring group membership, and giving their lives meaning" (Boaz 1997, 258).

Figure 2. "The Great Sea Serpent." An etching contained in the Hart Nautical Museum portrays a formidable sea serpent off the coast of Greenland. The scene reproduces a famous sketch appearing in an eighteenth-century account by Hans Egede (1741), the Norwegian missionary to Greenland, which itself purports to depict a 1734 sighting by his son Poul Egede. The portrayal captures the mood of wonder amidst a natural world still alive with danger and discovery. Reproduced with permission of the Hart Nautical Collections, MIT Museum, Cambridge, Mass. (Special thanks to Kurt Hasselbalch, Curator, for his kind assistance).

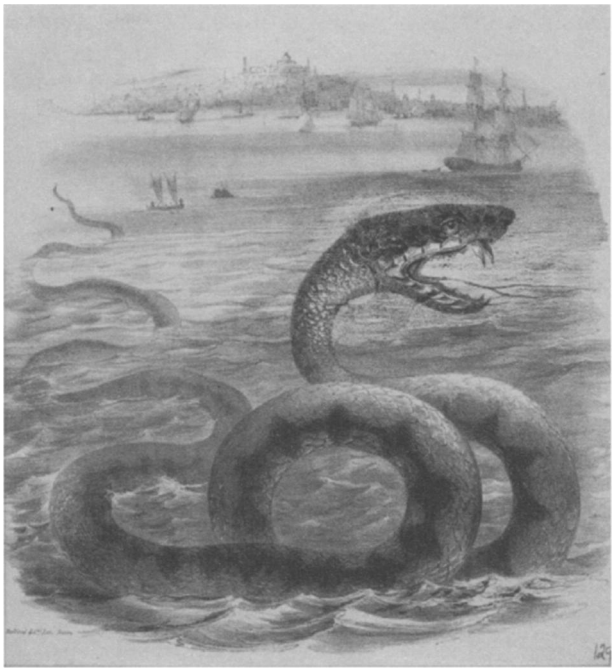

Figure 3. A lithograph engraved by J. H. Bufford & Co. (date uncertain) depicts another realistic serpent, this one encroaching quite close upon the shallows of a habited and densely trafficked coastline. The human backdrop for the detailed study in natural history provides context and perspective. Cryptozoology in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has sought increasingly to locate awesome or monstrous species in the midst of well-travelled, and well-charted human territories. Reproduced with permission of the Hart Nautical Museum, MIT Museum, Cambridge, Mass.

In the late eighteenth century, scholars were divided over whether or not any species had ever gone truly extinct: at stake was the stability of God's plan for the created world. In 1779, David Hume commented offhand that, "as far as history or tradition reaches, there appears not to be any single species which has yet been extinguished in the universe" (Smith 1947, 207). By the late twentieth century, however, it was widely recognised that human activity would be singly responsible for a wave of mass extinctions on a scale not seen for sixty-five million years (Flannery and Schouten 2001, xiii–xv). People in the developed world accordingly developed a pronounced sense of guilt over the decimation of natural habitats and the elimination or near-elimination of numerous species (Daegling 2004, 250; Wylie 1980, 224–35). One important function of cryptozoology, then, is to repopulate liminal space with potentially undiscovered creatures that have resisted human devastation. [23] If there are entire species—large species, even—that have survived not only active human management, but even human detection, then we feel a little humbler about our ability to alter the natural biosphere and, perhaps, a little less guilty about the damage we have inflicted on it. It is significant that cryptozoologists devote much attention to extinct species in particular, exploring them as potential candidates for putative cryptids. This forms a bridge with the distant past, repopulating the landscape with living zoological treasures and symbolically reviving primordial eons otherwise known to us only through movies

and books. The whole business of mass extinction seems less overwhelming and depressing in the face of mysteries left to be discovered.

There is a rugged sense of adventurism both in the methodology of cryptozoology and in the narrative descriptions of cryptid encounters. A familiar theme from accounts of bigfoot and other cryptid sightings is that, during a close encounter, the creature is just as startled as the human observer is—a chestnut drawn from popular naturalist expeditions purporting to observe animals in their natural habitats (such as the old television show "Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom" and, more recently, "Crocodile Hunter"). [24] By appealing to such tropes, cryptozoologists rhetorically assimilate themselves with the courageous first generation of naturalists who tracked down strange new species in poorly mapped regions. One cannot help but sense a nostalgia for bygone eras of scientific discovery in the cryptozoological community as a whole: as George Eberhart observes, "Cryptozoologists are reliving a time two centuries ago when all of zoology was in an age of discovery. This field preserves the spirit of those days" (Eberhart 2002, vol. 1, xxxi). Loren Coleman and Jerome Clark write:

> It is safe to say that in its essence, cryptozoology represents a throwback to the way original zoological study was conducted. In the beginning, as explorers trekked to new lands and listened to local informants, they were led to remarkable new species ... Cryptozoology keeps alive the tradition of discovery and recognition of new species of animals (Coleman and Clark 1999, 18).

Gerald Durrell, in the "Introduction" to the revised 1995 edition of Heuvelman's seminal *Sur la Piste des Bêtes Ignorées* (*On the Track of Unknown Animals*), muses, "In these days of high-speed travel the world has become a rather drab place from an explorer's point of view, so it is nice to think that in the few remaining inaccessible parts of the globe there may be animals unknown to science, awaiting discovery" (Heuvelmans 1995, xx–xxi). But these inaccessible parts of the globe are not simply tiny Pacific islands or remote nooks of the Amazon: they include large tracts of North America, Scotland, mainland Europe—in short, they recast familiar and over-trammelled terrain as wilderness. Texas, Indiana, and Pennsylvania, to cite but a few unlikely examples outside of the Pacific Northwest, have active bigfoot societies. Cryptozoology books and organisations frequently point out that the North American landscape is not so charted as people may think (Newton 2005, 4–6). This recalibration of the known and the unknown helps recapture the frontier so sanctified in American mythic consciousness, just as British and European analogues recapture the primal forest nostalgically embedded in the historical roots of European literature and folklore. We are invited to find ourselves at the very threshold of the wilderness once more—often from the comfort of home or at an easy drive's distance, even.

The roles of hunter and hunted, of civilised and uncivilised, of predator and victim, have become reversed in reports of contemporary cryptid encounters. We now project not fear of the unknown, but protectionism, on our undiscovered friends. The Pennsylvania Bigfoot Society prides itself on being a "non-kill" organisation, and the Bigfoot Field Researchers Organization states that its long-term goal is to determine "how these rare and elusive animals can and should be protected and studied after their existence is generally acknowledged by governmental agencies and the scientific community." [25] Skamania County, Washington famously passed an ordinance imposing a fine of up to $10,000 and up

to five years in jail for the "willful and wanton slaying" of a bigfoot. [26] The Sakten Wildlife Sanctuary in Bhutan is a park of six hundred and fifty square kilometres created exclusively to preserve the habitat of the Mirgu, the Bhutanese variant of the Yeti. [27] The places that protect such spectacular species may be suspected of having ulterior motives, since they are also areas for which tourism is an important source of revenue, but the evidence gleaned from cryptozoology enthusiasts in online message boards is free of such motives. A thread on "Protecting Cryptids" on Cryptozoology.com, for instance, shows an overflowing of concern for the well-being of undiscovered species. One participant posts that her "biggest fear" is that with "all the pollution, Ice caps melting, Global warming, the navy's sonar system, H.A.R.P., and many other hazards out there ...we will lose them all [cryptids] before any of us get to see, and know the beauty of the animal." [28] She opines that the loss of Bigfoot, Nessie, and "the many loved cryptids ... would be a tragic loss to mankind." This *a priori* posture of guilt reflects a very different attitude from Pliny's curiosity, from the bestiary's meditation on the symbolic meanings encoded throughout God's creation, or from the *Liber monstrorum*'s zoophobic apprehension and mistrust.

Most central of all, however—the plesiosaur in the room, as it were—is the very mystique of para-science. Cryptozoology devotees consciously position themselves in defiance of mainstream science. [29] Whereas in the Middle Ages the educated scholar was as likely—or as unlikely—as an illiterate peasant to believe in a given unconfirmed species, in the post-Enlightenment world there is a conspicuous disconnect between academic science and popular belief on a surprisingly wide range of topics. The ubiquitous popular belief in ghosts, psychic ability, alien encounters, communication with the dead, and astrology, to name but a sampling of the "paranormal," documents a resistance to the canons of belief doled out by the orthodox structures of contemporary academic science. In an age when evolutionary scientists have all but robbed Judeo-Christians of their account of creation, genetic engineering appears to threaten the sanctity and individuality of human life, and medical authorities continuously make the general populace feel guilty about those very hallmarks of an affluent leisure-society that it apparently treasures most (high-fat and high-sugar diet, recreational use of tobacco, alcohol, and pharmaceuticals, and inactivity), it is natural that an undercurrent of resistance to beliefs imposed from above by an academic elite should flourish. In such an atmosphere, the para-sciences will inevitably thrive, not just *despite* evidence to the contrary from the scientific community, but—more to the point—actively *in spite* of it. To be on to something that even the professors of Harvard do not know about, or to benefit from a cure of which the National Institutes of Health are ignorant, can be very empowering in an age of routine deference to higher bodies of institutional knowledge.

We find this to be the case: even a brief glance at paranormal apologetic literature reveals a pioneer enthusiasm, a notable relish at the chance to offer a counter-perspective against the allegedly closed-minded sycophants of institutional academic beliefs. Bernard Heuvelmans writes in the preface to the 1995 revised edition of the English translation of *On the Track of Unknown Animals*:

> In the 1950s, I was an angry young zoologist, indignant at the ostracism imposed by official science—we would say today the scientific *Establishment*—on those animals known only through the reports of isolated travellers, or through often fantastic native legends, or from

simple but mysterious footprints, or the recital of sometimes bloody depredations, or through traditional images, or even a few ambiguous photos (Heuvelmans 1995, xxiv). [30]

In retrospect—encouraged by Heuvelmans's own mature and reflective wording—we are tempted to understand the "anger" of the 1950s and the nature of the "Establishment" in a different light. Just as counter-culture thrives perennially on defining itself against a "mainstream" that often has little more substance than reactionaries insist on giving it, so cryptozoology seems to draw nourishment to some extent from its own spirit of iconoclasm.

Jonathan Downes, Director of the Centre for Fortean Zoology, recalls his entrance into cryptozoology as a child after reading a juvenile work on the subject: "The idea that there could be creatures such as the Loch Ness Monster, the yeti, Bigfoot and the giant mystery cats of Africa was fantastic; but even better was the idea that dragons and other creatures which I had read about in storybooks had some sort of corporeal reality. At the age of seven, torn between the wondrous vistas which the new book had opened up for me and obsession with the rich and curious world of C. S. Lewis's Narnia books with dragons, unicorns, satyrs and centaurs, I knew exactly what I was going to do with my life: I was going to be a monster hunter" (Coghlan 2004, 3). Cryptozoology thus fulfils an important role: it represents a quest for magic and wonder in a world many perceive as having lost its mystique.

Notes

[1] Babylonian incantation: Thompson 1903, vol. 1, 121; medieval amulet: The *Leechbook* 3.61 (*wiþ ælfcynne ond nihtgengan*; edited in Cockayne 1865, vol. 2, 344); St Columba: *Life of Columba* (Anderson and Anderson 1961, 386–8).

[2] Coghlan 2004; Coleman and Clark 1999; Coleman and Huyghe 2003; Eberhart 2002; Newton 2005. David Gilmore (2003, 98) notes the general lack of cultural analysis of Sasquatch and Sasquatch believers.

[3] Many definitions of cryptids seem to rely on our expectations or subjective response, rather than on characteristics of the species themselves: Roy Mackal, for instance, defines cryptozoology as "the study and investigation of evidence for animals unexpected in time or place or in size or shape" (Foreword to Shuker 1995, 9).

[4] Strabo writes: "all who have written about India have proved themselves, for the most part, fabricators" (Jones 1969, 263). A seminal text in the sceptical tradition is Palaephatus's *On Unbelievable Tales* (fourth century BC), printed in Stern 1996.

[5] See, for instance, the role cryptids play in mediating between sceptical science and myth in Greek and Roman society, as discussed in Mayor 2000.

[6] For meditations on the role of monsters in classical antiquity, see Buxton 1994, esp. 201–4; Morgan 1984, 27–43. For a convenient overview of responses to fabled creatures from numerous sources, from the earliest times to the twentieth century, see Nigg 1999.

[7] See Nigg 1999, 142; Kitchell and Resnick 1999, 36–7. On pp. 143–6 Nigg documents some of Albertus's scathing dismissals of traditional reports regarding fantastic creatures.

[8] It is curious, despite the fact that no one knows whether cryptids even exist, how many hundreds of illustrations, artistic reconstructions, and depictions of various sorts appear in these cryptozoology guides, to accompany the usual handful of contested photographs. These modern "bestiaries" themselves would make an interesting study in iconographic folklore.

[9] Pamela Gravestock concludes, "Perhaps the most useful way to approach the problem of imaginary animals is to hypothesize that medievals knew quite well that these animals did not exist and to view the question as to whether or not they actually existed as irrelevant ... perhaps, then, the imaginary animals in the bestiaries were used to fill certain 'spiritual gaps' for which the real animals were not as readily adaptable" (Gravestock 1999, 130). For a provocative meditation on belief in the ancient world, still highly relevant to the Middle Ages, see Veyne (1983).

[10] For Atlantis, see Plato, *Critias* 108e-121c (Hamilton and Cairns 1961, 1214–24).

[11] Anonymous, *Liber monstrorum*, Preface: *probandi si sint uera an instructa mendacio, nullus patet accessus eaque per orbem terrarum aurato sermone miri rumoris fama dispergebat* (edited in Orchard 1995, 254–6). Unless otherwise stated, all translations are mine.

[12] The mid-eleventh-century manuscript is BL Cotton Tiberius B.v (fols. 78v–87v), which forms the basis of Orchard's edition in *Pride and Prodigies* (1995, 175–81). In the same work, Orchard also edits the Old English version from the *Beowulf* manuscript (BL Cotton Vitellius A.xv, fols. 98v–106v).

[13] Ethiopians: *genus est hominum ualde nigrum qui Ethiopes uocantur* (Orchard 1995, 180); gorgon-eyed beasts (*ibid.* 176).

[14] Anonymous, *Wonders of the East*: *þæt syndon ungefregelicu deor* (edited in Orchard 1995, 186).

[15] Manuscript: British Library Cotton Royal 13.A.i; text edited in Boer 1973. See also Gunderson 1980 for background, analysis, and translation. Orchard (in *Pride and Prodigies*) also provides an edition of the Latin and Old English versions at pp. 204–23 and 225–53, respectively.

[16] The Nowell Codex, now bound as part of Cotton Vitellius A.xv, is available in facsimile edition in Malone 1963. *Beowulf* is edited in Klaeber 1950, *The Wonders of the East* and the *Letter of Alexander* are edited in Orchard 1995, and the *Passion of St. Christopher* is edited in Rypins 1924.

[17] Anonymous, *Liber monstrorum de diversis generibus* ("Book of Monsters of Various Kinds"), ed. Orchard *Pride and Prodigies* 1995, 254–316.

[18] For the catalogue, see esp. Orchard 1995, 90, note 23. Lisa Verner argues that the *Liber monstrorum* is contemptuous of information derived from pagan authors such as Virgil, while remaining neutral toward Christian authors such as Augustine: thus the authorial stance of epistemological acceptance or rejection is deployed as part of an ongoing ideological programme valorising Christian truth over pagan falsehood (Verner 2005, 58–65).

[19] Orchard agrees: "the continual sense of conflict and animosity between monsters and men is the hallmark of this author's work, and represents a considerable departure from the less antagonistic approaches of such predecessors as Augustine, Isidore, or Pliny" (Orchard 1995, 89–90). Campbell, meanwhile, finds that in the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*, "mineralogical-botanical marvels are openly admired, zoological-anthropological marvels are feared or despised" (Campbell 1988, 69). For more general analysis of medieval approaches to the monstrous, see Williams 1996.

[20] Anonymous, *Liber monstrorum: si tanta monstrorum essent genera credenda quanta in abditis mundi partibus* (Orchard 1995, 254).

[21] Gerald of Wales, *Topographia Hibernica: Sicut enim orientales plagæ propriis quibusdam et sibi innatis præeminent et præcellunt ostentis, sic et occidentales circumferentiæ suis naturæ miraculis illustrantur. Quoties quippe, tanquam seriis et veris fatigata negotiis, paululum secedit et excedit, remotis in partibus, quasi verecundis et occultis natura ludit excessibus* (Dimock 1867, 20–1). See Mittman 2003 for discussion.

[22] For reflection on the psychological need for monsters, see, for instance, Adams 2001; Ellis 1994, 374–6; Jones 2000.

[23] David Quammen finds an even deeper motive in the human psyche for large predators to exist around us in nature—they fill an important existential gap: "They keep us company. The universe is a very big place, but as far as we know it's mainly empty, boring, and cold. If we exterminate the last magnificently scary beasts on planet Earth, as we seem bent upon doing, then no matter where we go for the rest of our history as a species—for the rest of time—we may never encounter any others. The only thing more dreadful than arriving on LV-426 [the planet from the movie *Alien*] and finding a nest of Aliens, I suspect, would be to arrive there, and on the next unexplored planet, and on the next after that, and find nothing" (Quammen 2003, 431).

[24] Most recently, see comments by veteran Loch Ness monster enthusiast Steve Feltham in *National Geographic*: "Whatever they are, they're very timid animals; they're more afraid of us than we are of them" (quoted in Morell 2005, 66).

[25] Pennsylvania Bigfoot Society: <http://www.pabigfootsociety.com/ > ; Bigfoot Field Researchers Organization <http://www.bfro.net/REF/aboutbfr.asp > . Examples could be proliferated easily: the first tenet of the British Columbia Scientific Cryptozoology Club reads, "The BCSCC does not believe in the killing of any cryptid whatsoever, for any purpose, including those in the interest of scientific research. We are a conservation and preservation-oriented organisation and reject the need to kill for the sake of science" (http://www.cryptosafari.com/bcscc/members.htm). Groups such as the Illinois Association for the Preservation and Study of the Lake Michigan Monster and the Pterodactyl Society ("dedicated to the discovery and preservation of the living pterosaurs on Earth") gain support through internet exposure.

[26] Skamania County Ordinance No. 69-01 (1 April 1969; see <http://www.inthegorge.com/bigfoot_ordinance.htm >). Vermont is said to have passed a resolution prohibiting the harming of "the Lake Champlain Sea Monster" in 1982, and New York to have followed suit in 1983 (Newton 2005, 96); British Columbia has reportedly done the same for Ogopogo. I sometimes question the authenticity of some of these purported imprimaturs of official recognition: despite numerous claims I have come across online that "Champ" (the Lake Champlain monster) is officially listed as an endangered species in Vermont, for instance, the media contact for the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department tells me that he is "not aware of any serious attempt to have 'Champ' listed as a endangered or threatened species in Vermont" (pers. comm., 4 August 2005).

[27] See <http://www.bootan.com/bhutan/articles/yeti.shtml > , linked from the Bhutan Department of Tourism.

[28] See <http://www.cryptozoology.com/forum/topic_view_thread.php?tid = 11&pid = 140294 > . I have been unable to determine exactly what "H.A.R.P." is, although an Internet search yields a small range of candidates potentially related to the environment: the U.S. military's Hazard Assessment of Rocket Propellants, NASA's High Altitude Research Projects, and conceivably, Australia's Health and Air Research Program. Alternately, it may be a typo.

[29] See Daegling's comments on the subject, with further citations and quotations (Daegling 2004, 256–7).

[30] Heuvelmans marvels at what he considers the "totally arbitrary" requirement of academic zoology that there should exist at least a single representative specimen of a proposed species, registered at a respectable institution, catalogued and available for study and comparison (Heuvelmans 1995, xxiv).

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